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small flowered ones whose fruits were not legumes strictly speaking. Being geologist and mineralogist, he is first among botanists to mention, in his ecologies of certain plants, the geologic formation, or at least the probable constituents of the soil in which they grow.

Throughout the volume, the work of each maker of a botanical landmark is analyzed, and the particular lines along which each wrought most are, as we have indicated above, made subjects of special paragraphs, each paragraph showing its caption in prominent type. The first of these paragraphs is always that of the Life of the botanist. These biographic sketches are more full by far than is usual in such history, and will doubtless be read with interest by all botanists, if not even by the unbotanical.

The work will shortly appear, and will form a part of Volume 54 of the Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections

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## Editorial Notes.

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### CHANGES IN PLANT NAMES.

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It may be seriously questioned whether in ruling that plant names must begin with the date of Linnaeus' Species Plantarum of 1753, more confusion has resulted than had ever been anticipated. More changes in nomenclature have been made since botanical congresses have convened than before it was deemed necessary to legislate in this matter. Every time a congress meets we are sure that as the result of its artificial decisions a number of well established names will go. The Vienna Congress decided that "nomenclature should not be arbitrary nor imposed by authority" (Art. 3) but based on priority. (Sect. 1, Art. 15) Apart from the fact that one of the first rules (Art. 19) absolutely precludes the idea of priority there can be no more arbitrary decision possible than the statement of Article 20.

*"However, to avoid disadvantageous changes in the nomenclature of genera* by the strict application of the rules of Nomenclature and especially of the principle of priority in starting from 1753 the rules provide a list of names which must be retained in all cases. These names are by preference those which have come into general use in the fifty years following their publication, or which have been

used in monographs and important floristic works up to 1890. The list of these names forms an appendix to the rules of Nomenclature."

The obvious reason for this arbitrary and sweeping exception to the law of priority since 1753 "*is to avoid changes in nomenclature.*" Has this been affected? As the rule may be and actually has been interpreted any change may still be made of a plant name which according to the rule is not in the list though it may have been in use up to 1890 for fifty years. In Gray's Manual, seventh edition, we find several such changes, and changes of names that had been up to the present time in use, *for not only fifty years but actually, in one case, for one hundred and fifty years!* Such changes are moreover, made by those who claim that they have "*scrupulously* endeavored to bring the nomenclature of the manual in accord with the Vienna agreement in order that American nomenclature may be freed as speedily as possible from peculiarity or provincialism, and assume the form which has received international sanction."\*

*Limnanthemum* was applied as a name of a segregate genus from the Linnaean *Menyanthes* by Gmelin in 1769, and there has been no other name used for it as a separate genus, up to 1908, the year of the seventh edition of Gray's Manual. It was found, however, the *Limnanthemum* had not priority and a name completely forgotten, *Nymphoides*, Hill 1756 substituted. As the name has priority no one could object to it except for etymological reasons which Linnaeus† gave more than a century and a half ago.

Whatever the reason there be for changing *Ulmaria* to *Filipendula*, the latter is new and the former has been used for more than a hundred years. Added to this *Ulmaria* is as a matter of fact as old as *Filipendula* even since 1753, both having been published by Hill, in 1756.‡

The best reason why *Nymphoides* can be used for *Limnanthemum* according to the rules is that it is not on the list of condemned names, though we feel sure that had that eminent assembly thought of the name it would certainly have been put on the list. The only way to do away with it according to international rules is for botanists to assemble again and condemn it.

I do not wish to cast a slur either on congresses which are not

\* Gray's Manual, 7th edition, 1908, Preface, p. 7.

† Hill, J. British Herbal. 1756.

‡ Linnaeus, C. Historia Botanica, 1751-1754.

supposed to be omniscient nor on editors who "scrupulously follow their rules," but the moral of the present discussion is that botanical congresses no matter how often they meet and how many rules they make, will never do what they set out to do; namely, "avoid disadvantageous changes in nomenclature."

On the whole we are inclined to think, after carefully studying the history of these changes, that fewer would be made by going back to the only fundamental reasonable principle of nomenclature, namely; *absolute historical* priority, not limited to 1753, but going back as far as we have any certain indisputable proof of the identity of plant names. The "starting point" 1753 in nomenclature, has been made to avoid confusion of names of genera, but results so far have not been forthcoming and it is safe to say that no more radical changes of names could or would result if we disregard entirely the artificial and unreasonable "starting point," 1753, as it is evident from such works as S. F. Gray's, 1821, E. L. Greene's, *Flora Franciscana*, and *Bay Region Botany*, or Bubani's *Flora Pyrenaea*, or Tidestrom's *Elysium Marianum* the principle of whose nomenclature goes back to even Theophrastus, Dioscorides, Galen, Pliny, Varro, Vergil, Dodonaeus, Lobelius and Brunfels for valid names of genera.

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#### THE CODE OF THE NEAR FUTURE.

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We have some very strong reasons to believe that it will be only the matter of a few years when botanists will come to see the futility of the contradictory codes in question of nomenclature. The Vienna Code was not expected to satisfy everybody by its arbitrary decrees, well meant though they be. American botanists especially are not satisfied, and already amendments have been proposed. Best of all we feel that it is becoming more apparent daily that the codes are not only not doing what they set out to do,—bring about uniformity, but they are actually "making confusion worse confounded." American botanists are pondering this matter deeply at present, and very little is being said in public. Every one that does consider the matter philosophically realizes that the codes must eventually come to the *principle of absolute historical priority* in matters of *biological nomenclature*. All artificial "starting points" of dates before which no names are to be taken, are coming to be looked upon as illogical. The leaven of truth is slowly fermenting in minds that are responsible for the science of the times, and it will not be very long before results show. It is to be questioned whether the actual changes of names necessary to be made to bring absolute historical priority of names into effect, would be many more than the exceptions to